



Lecture II: The report writer's pyramid

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Technical Report Writing

➤ If we were to ask you what you find most difficult about report writing, would one of these be your answer?

1. Getting started.
2. Organizing the information: arranging it in the proper order.
3. The writing: getting the right words down on paper the first time. (*Learn How to Utilize the Basic Patterns & Elements of the Sentence*)

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Technical Report Writing Getting started - example

- Dave Kowalchuk has spent two weeks examining his company's methods for ordering, receiving, storing, and issuing parts for the electronic equipment the company services.
- He has discovered that the inventory control system is inefficient, and has investigated alternative methods and devised a better system.
- Now he is ready to write a report describing his findings and suggestions.

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- But Dave is having trouble getting started.
- When he sits down to write, he just can't seem to find the right words.
- He writes a few sentences, and sometimes several paragraphs, yet each time he discards them.
- He is frustrated because he is unable to bring his message into focus.

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Technical Report Writing

➤ Getting Started:

1. Who is my reader?
2. What do I most want to tell that reader?
3. What will the reader do with this information?

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2. What do I most want to tell that reader?

Identifying the Reader:

- If you are writing a memo report to your manager, you will know immediately to whom you are writing (although you may have to give some thought to other possible readers, if your manager is likely to circulate your memo).
- But if your report will have a wider readership—as Dave's may well have—then you must decide who is to be your primary reader and write for that particular person.
- Trying to write for a broad range of readers can be as difficult as trying to write with no particular reader in mind. (In both cases you will have no focal point for your message).

- Without a properly defined focal point your message may be fuzzy.

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1. Who is my reader?

Identifying the Reader:

- What does the reader want, expect, or need to hear from me?
- How much does the reader know already?
- What effect do I want my report to have on the reader?
- Are other people likely to read my report?

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Technical Report Writing

1. Who is my reader?

Identifying the Reader:

- What does the reader want, expect, or need to hear from me?
- You have to decide whether your reader will want a simple statement of facts or a detailed explanation of circumstances and events.
- You also have to consider whether the reader needs to know how certain facts were derived.

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1. Who is my reader?

Identifying the Reader:

- How much does the reader know already?
- The answer to this question will provide you with a starting point for your report, since there is no need to repeat information the reader already knows.

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1. Who is my reader?

Identifying the Reader:

- What effect do I want my report to have on the reader?
- You have to decide whether the purpose of your report is to inform or to persuade.
- In an informative report you simply relate the necessary facts, and then you stop.
- In a persuasive report you have to convince the reader to act or react, which can mean simply approving a plan you propose, or ordering materials or equipment on your behalf, or authorizing a change in policies and procedures.

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1. Who is my reader?

Identifying the Reader:

- Are other people likely to read my report?
- You have to consider the route your report takes before and after it reaches your reader, and to whom you may send copies.
- If the report will pass through other people's hands, then you must consider how much additional information you will have to insert to satisfy their curiosity.
- At the same time you must not let your desire to satisfy additional readers deflect you from focusing on the primary reader's needs and expectations.)

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2. What do I most want to tell that reader?

➤ **Identifying the Message:**

Dave must examine the results of his investigation and decide which results will be most useful to Maria Pavano. His aim should be to find key information that will spark Maria's interest so she will want to know more. For example, would she most want to know that:

1. The company's supply system is out of date and inefficient?
2. Other businesses Dave has investigated have better supply systems?
3. There are several ways the company's supply system can be improved?
4. Improvements to the company's supply system will increase efficiency?
5. Changes to the supply system will save time and money?

Although all these points are valid, Dave reasons that Maria will be most interested in knowing how to save the department time and money. As increased efficiency is the key to these savings, he decides to combine points 4 and 5 into a single message. So he writes:

Improvements to our inventory control system will increase efficiency and save time and money.

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Technical Report Writing

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Technical Report Writing

Exercise: Model Answer

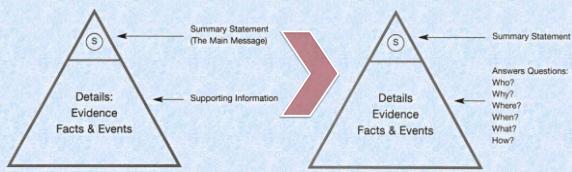
➤ Here is how Dave Kowalchuk used these five steps to start his report on the company's supply system:

1. He identified his primary reader as Maria Pavano, Manager of Purchasing and Supply.
2. He decided he most wanted to tell Maria that the department can save time and money by improving its inventory control system.
3. He wrote: "*I want to tell you that ...*"
4. He finished the sentence by writing: "... improvements to our inventory control system will increase efficiency and save time and money."
5. He **deleted the six words** he had written in step 3.

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Technical Report Writing

The report writer's pyramid



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Technical Report Writing

Exercise: Model Answer

➤ You can use the **hidden words technique** to help you start every report you write. Just follow these steps:

1. Identify your reader.
2. Decide what you most want to tell your reader.
3. Write down the six words *I want to tell you that...*
4. Complete the sentence by writing what you decided to tell your reader in step 2. *This is your Main Message*.
5. Delete the six hidden words of step 3.

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Exercise: Model Answer

➤ Step 4 became the **opening sentence** in Dave's report; that is, he used it as his **Summary Statement** (or **Main Message**).

➤ But when Dave examined the words more closely he realized that, although what he had written was accurate, as an opening statement it was too abrupt.

➤ He remembered that a **Summary Statement** must not only inform but also **create interest** and encourage the reader to **continue reading**.

➤ So he rearranged his information and inserted additional words to soften the abruptness.

➤ At the same time he took great care not to lose sight of his original message, and after several attempts he wrote:

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Exercise: Model Answer

➤ (I want to tell you that...) My examination of our inventory control system shows we can increase departmental efficiency, save time, and reduce costs by improving our methods for ordering, storing, and issuing stock.

Technical Report Writing

Exercise: Model Answer

- We suggest that you, like Dave Kowalchuk, use the "*hidden words*" method every time you have to write a report.
- It will help you start more easily and ensure that you focus your readers' attention immediately onto the most important information.

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Technical Report Writing

Exercise: Model Answer - Developing the Details

- There are six questions a reader may ask: Who?, Why?, Where?, When?, What?, and How?
- But first you have to identify which of these questions your readers would most likely ask.
- Say to yourself:
 - If I were the intended reader, which questions would I ask after I had read only the **Summary Statement**?
- Dave Kowalchuk, for example, might say to himself:
 - "What questions will Maria Pavano be likely to ask immediately after she has read my **Summary Statement**?"
 - **Dave would probably come up with the following questions:**

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Tutorial - Quiz Two

➤ Using the writer's pyramid method, write an essay (in no more than 250 words) to help inform high school students why you chose to study Oral and Dental Medicine as your career.

Readings this week:
Blicq, Chapter 2, pp. 2-15.

Next Session:
Fundamentals of the sentence + Quiz solution

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Remember:

➤ You have to think of the following:

1. **Who is my reader?** (identify your reader)
2. **What do I most want to tell that reader?** (identify the message)
3. **What will the reader do with this information?**
4. **Give details.** (the six questions a reader may ask: Who?, Why?, Where?, When?, What?, and How?)

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